Information Briefing

Religion and Customs in Kuwait

by

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Purpose

To provide an overview of the Muslim religion and customs in the country of Kuwait.

Outline

- Composition of Kuwait
- Characteristics of Islam
- The Prophet Muhammad
- Five Pillars of Islam
- Public and Religious Holidays
- Religious Tolerance/Cultural Issues
- Conclusion

Composition of Kuwait

Ethnic Composition: Kuwaiti 45%; Other Arab 35%; South Asian 9%; Iranian 4%; Other 7%

Religious Composition: Muslim (Shi'ite 30%, Sunni 45%, other 10%) = 85%

Christian, Hindu, Parsi, and other = 15%

Characteristics of Islam
(1 of 3)

- ***The Islamic religion*** is based on the 'submission' to the will of Allah.
- ***Allah*** is the Arabic word for "God'
- ***Muslim*** means "one who submits to the will of Allah"
- ***The Qur'an, Sunnah*** and ***Hadith*** provide the sources of Islamic teachings, ethos, and framework for the ***Shari'a,*** Islam's body of law

Characteristics of Islam
(2 of 3)

- The Islamic faith can be summed up in the profession of faith: **"There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger."**
- Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions along with Christianity and Judaism---a (single) view of God
- Islam is not just a religion, it is a way of life for Muslims

Characteristics of Islam
(3 of 3)

- Islam is a system of rules to be followed; it prescribes order in society

- The sacred is not **separated from the secular**

- There are no ordained **clergy; nor separate** religious organization or ‘church’

The Prophet Muhammad
(1 of 2)

- Islam teaches Allah revealed Himself to a number of prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus
- Islam teaches Muhammad was given God's final and complete revelation
- The Prophet was born in Mecca about AD 570

The Prophet Muhammad
(2 of 2)

- Islam teaches Muhammad received the spoken word of Allah from the angel Gabriel containing the foundation of the faith while in Mecca in the 7th century AD
- Islam teaches the Prophet began receiving the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan in AD 610
- The process of revelation continued until his death in AD 632
- Various sects developed after his death

Five Pillars of Islam

- ***Bearing witness*** to Allah and that Muhammad is the final Prophet *(Shahada)*
- ***Praying*** five times a day; facing Mecca *(Salat)*
- ***Giving alms*** to the needy *(Zakat) or* 2.5% of annual earnings
- ***Fasting*** from dawn to sunset through Ramadan *(Saum)*
- ***Making a pilgrimage*** to Mecca at least once in a lifetime (Hajj)

Public and Religious Holidays
(1 of 2)

- **January 1st (New Year's Day)**
- **February 25th (Kuwait National Day) marks independence from Britain in 1961**
- **February 26th (Kuwait Liberation Day) marks the end of the Gulf War and Iraqi aggression in Kuwait in 1991**
- **The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday**
- **The Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad**

Public and Religious Holidays
(2 of 2)

- Eid Al-Adha (feast of sacrifice and completion of pilgrimage, usually a four-day holiday)
- Eid Al-Fitr (the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadon)
- Ramadan, the ninth and most holy month of the Islamic year, is a month of fasting, during which it is believed the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the first Islamic century

Religious Tolerance

- Christians and other religious minorities enjoy an unusual amount of religious freedom
- Kuwait truly exemplifies the words of its constitution, which states that “freedom of practicing religion IAW established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals.”
- Authorities recognize three principal churches: the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait, the Roman Catholic Church, and the

Religious Tolerance

- Kuwait is the only member of the Gulf Cooperation council to maintain diplomatic ties with the Vatican State, dating back to 1968.

- Kuwait's Roman Catholic community, described by Pope John Paul II as "vibrant," is 100,000 strong and composed mainly of East Indians and Filipinos, though many are European, American, and Lebanese

Cultural Issues
(Things To Do)

- Always shake hands (with the *Right* hand) when you meet or bid farewell to a Kuwaiti
- Keep your *Left* hand at your side, in your pocket or behind your back
- Try to learn some of the language and customs
- Be careful of what you say—most Kuwaitis speak /understand English
- Follow the dress code (tight pants, running shoes and ear rings are associated with

Cultural Issues
(Things Not To Do 1 of 2)

- Do NOT go into a Mosque on your own
- Do NOT “Dutch Treat” (you invite—you pay)
- Do NOT take photos without permission—

  especially of females
- Do NOT use unfamiliar language or gestures
- Do NOT expose soles of feet/shoes

Cultural Issues
(Things Not To Do 2 of 2)

- Do NOT use left hand – it is associated with & only used for the most personal of hygiene
- Do NOT attempt to start a conversation with a woman that is not US military or obviously a western
- Do NOT admire possessions
- Do NOT stare or make comments to females or show affection toward a woman in public

Cultural Issues
(Marriage and Family)

- Muslim men may have up to four wives
- Arranged marriages are still common
- Extended family living arrangements
- Birth right and family status

Conclusion